

## July 25, 2008 - Legislators Discuss Energy Programs

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U.S. Reps. Bill Shuster, R-9th District, and John Murtha, D-12th District, each say their party's energy legislation would lower gas prices and increase domestic energy production.

House Republicans introduced the American Energy Act on Wednesday. Shuster is an original cosponsor of the initiative, which contains provisions of his own Energy Independence Act.

"House Republicans have driven the energy debate in Congress and the American people have responded to our message with popular support," Shuster said in a press release. "It is now time to merge our efforts and provide Americans with a clear alternative to Democratic inaction on energy. I introduced the 'Energy Independence Act' to reverse decades of failed energy policies that have led to our deepening dependence on foreign oil and skyrocketing gas prices. My bill offers the comprehensive approach we need to completely change our energy economy and I am pleased Republican leadership has responded to my efforts."

Murtha countered that on July 17, the House voted on the Drill Responsibly in Leased Lands (DRILL) Act. It failed to reach a two-thirds vote necessary for passage. The vote was split largely along party lines, with 218 Democrats voting in favor of the bill and 162 Republicans against. The act promoted domestic production of oil and natural gas and would increase domestic oil supply.

According to Murtha, congressional Democrats have also:

- Called upon the president to release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to immediately expand supply and reduce gas

prices.

- Passed legislation to suspend filling of the reserve until the end of the year in order to reduce gas prices.

- Pushed legislation to authorize the U.S. Justice Department to investigate and punish wholesalers and retailers who artificially inflate the price of gasoline during times of peak demand or emergency.

- Passed the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (signed into law on December 19). The law includes provisions to combat oil market manipulation, raise fuel economy standards for automobiles and promote the use of more affordable American biofuels.

House Democrats have also passed legislation that would repeal \$14 billion in federal subsidies given to big oil companies, Murtha said.

Shuster said the American Energy Act includes many of the initiatives that form the core of his energy legislation including:

- The inclusion of his Alternative Energy Trust Fund to direct rents, bonus bids and royalty revenue resulting from domestic drilling lease sales into the fund to pay for renewable and alternative energy.

- Provisions to spur investment in the production of nuclear and coal-to-liquid fuels.

- Language to open the Outer Continental Shelf, which would provide an additional 3 million barrels of oil per day, as well as 76 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, according to his office. The bill also proposes opening Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling, which would provide an additional 1 million barrels of oil per day.

- Development of America's shale oil resources, which could provide an additional 2.5 million barrels of oil per day.

In addition to these sections, the Republican energy legislation also includes provisions that Shuster supports to cut red tape blocking the construction of new refineries, provide tax incentives for businesses and families to buy fuel efficient vehicles, and extend tax incentives for fuel efficient home construction.

Murtha supports drilling, but said the current problem cannot be solved by drilling alone. The Department of Energy says that even if the United States would allow additional off-shore drilling today, the impact on oil and gas prices would be "insignificant" before 2030.

“One of the problems we have is that we have seen a dramatic increase in world oil consumption,” he said.

Taken together, China, India, Russia and the Middle East now consume more barrels of oil per day than the U.S., Murtha said, with Chinese oil consumption alone doubling in the past 10 years. That, coupled with the declining value of the dollar — which Murtha attributed to Bush administration policies — has served to make oil even more expensive.

Murtha said he has long advocated moving away from a dependence on foreign oil and developing alternative fuel technologies. A diversified energy supply, generated in America, will reduce costs to consumers and improve the environment, he said.

The congressman has also secured funding for initiatives like coal-to-gas and coal-to-jet-fuel conversion, fuel cell technologies, and wind energy. A coal-to-jet-fuel program started at Penn State University has helped the U.S. Air Force test synthetic fuels in current airframes, Murtha said.

Cambria County has the largest fuel cell test and evaluation center in the United States, testing fuel cells for both transportation and power systems. In 2005, Murtha helped attract Gamesa, a Spanish windmill manufacturer, to western Pennsylvania through an initiative to develop wind power at remote military bases. By using wind energy, military installations will be able to diversify their energy production and lower their costs.

“America’s energy problems are going to require both short-term and long-term fixes, and it’s going to take all of us, Democrats and Republicans, working together to solve them,” he said.